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ANCIENT ROME

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE
ROMAN REPUBLIC



VICTOR MILLER

ANCIENT ROME

The Rise and Fall of the Roman republic

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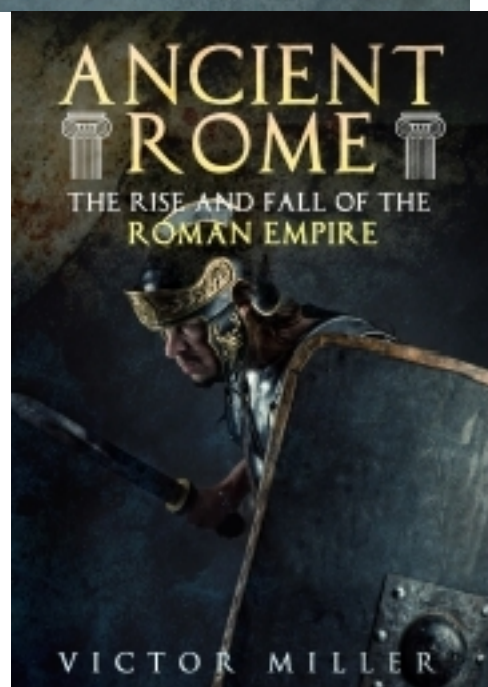


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Introduction

When we left off in the story of Rome in our last book, *The Rise of the Roman Kingdom*, the people had risen against the last Roman king, angered by his and his son's transgressions against the kingdom. After centuries of consolidating Roman power in a kingdom and unifying disparate tribes under a king, Rome had decided that a new approach was needed. The Roman Republic was born.

What would come from this mini revolution would redefine Rome naturally, but would also redefine the concept of government in the Western world. Initially established to cater to the elite class of patricians, the Roman Republic would eventually transition into a democracy, driven by the will and power of the plebeians. During this time, Rome would also establish the core principles of Roman law and justice, which would affect nations for millennia to come.

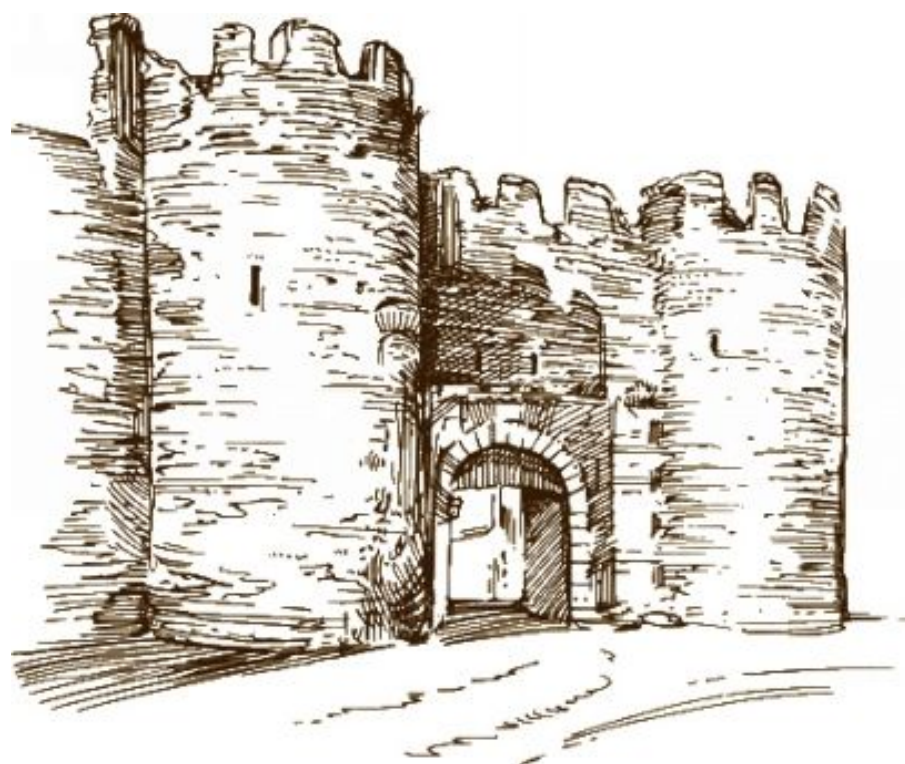
The period from 509 B.C. to 27 B.C. also defined a new ambition in Rome. Rome would go from managing local tribes to perceiving itself as the dominant force in a much wider region. Unending lust for power and wealth would lead to an immense Republic, but would also ultimately be the undoing of the new system, leading in the end to Empire.

This move for more power in the region would face Rome off against another mighty force in the region—the incomparable Carthage. This Punic city state in North Africa could well have rivaled Rome in the annals of history were it not for the decisive series of wars fought between these two powers. The Punic Wars remain iconic to this day and include such memorable events as Hannibal's crossing of the Alps and several legendary battles.

The Roman Republic would become more and more complex, as would its leaders. It is no surprise that the Republic's last leader remains one of Rome's best-known figures to this day. Caesar's tale of power and prestige is legendary and brings the tale of the Roman Republic to a dynamic end.

So let's jump in and see where Rome went from its days of kings.

Searching for a new political paradigm that eschewed monarchy, Rome would go through many compelling permutations on the road to ultimate empire.



I

The End of the Kingdom and the Rise of the Republic



In this first chapter, we will look at the rise of the Republic—the early years right after the end of the kingdom. The defeat of the king was a first, great act of "the mob" in one sense, and a herald of what was to come as the plebeians gained more power and the arch rule of the patricians waned. Some vestiges of the old Roman kingdom would remain, but the city was now on a trajectory to become a very different political state and one that would define a new governmental model for millennia to come.

As we left off in the last book, the last king of Rome, Tarquinius, had been deposed and banished. The resentments of the people and the patricians had been building against the sovereign slowly over time, as he accrued more power and wielded a heavier hand in the kingdom. The final straw came, it is said, when Tarquinius' own son violated a noblewoman known as Lucretia. This act was the battle cry the rebellious patricians needed, and the aristocracy unified against the king and established the Republic in 509 B.C.

One key figure in deposing Tarquinius and establishing the early Republic was Lucius Junius Brutus. Brutus was the son of Tarquinius' own sister. In the mercenary and incestuous culture of ancient Rome, it comes as little surprise that Tarquinius's own nephew would turn against him. Brutus had many a reason to resent the king, who had put to death a number of Rome's aristocracy, including Brutus' own brother. Brutus, a tremendously clever man, managed to avoid getting on Tarquinius' bad side for years by pretending to be mentally deficient. In fact, Brutus would become a leading light in the young Republic and an important rival of the king. He was one of the four noblemen who rallied the public after the suicide of Lucretia and would become one of the first consuls of the Republic. After ascending to the consulship, he would famously lead his fellow Romans in what is now known as the "Oath of Brutus", declaring that no Roman would ever claim allegiance or fealty to a king.

Tarquinius' Revenge

Tarquinius took neither his deposition nor the betrayal of his nephew lightly. He had pulled off quite a feat in attaining the throne in the first place—it was not likely that such a man would give up easily. After he was exiled from Rome, Tarquinius made several attempts to wrest the throne from the power of the Senate and the Consul. These conflicts would define much of the early Republic.

His first volley was to send ambassadors to the Senate, requesting the return of family assets lost or seized during the royal coup. Under this guise, the ambassadors actually had a very different reason for being in Rome—they wanted to recruit as many of the aristocracy as possible to Tarquinius's side. These actions would become known as the Tarquinian conspiracy and were the first challenge to the young Republic.

Serving as ambassadors to Tarquinius, were key figures in the life of Brutus, the new consul of Rome. The ambassadors included Brutus' own sons, Titus and Tiberius, and his brother-in-law. The conspirators were within days, even moments, of success when the conspiracy was uncovered. Brutus' relatives were gathered and summarily executed. The Senate also kept Tarquinius' assets, which they had been planning to return to the deposed king, and bestowed it upon the Roman public who were allowed to plunder the various properties.

It is said that Brutus' resolve in putting his own sons to death as traitors cemented his reputation amongst Romans. Brutus proved that first and foremost he was an ally of Rome and that no personal feelings would ever interfere with his loyalty to the city.

In the face of such moral courage, however, Tarquinius would not stand down. Since his "diplomatic" attempts had failed, he had only one recourse before him—to take up arms.

Veii and Tarquinii

To support his military foray against Rome, Tarquinius turned to two nearby cities—Veii and Tarquinii. He had two interesting cards to play with each of these cities respectively. With Tarquinii, he could claim close family ties and demand their loyalty. With Veii, he needed only to remind them of the many times they had lost key battles and land to the powerful Rome to get them on his side.

With these two, key allies, Tarquinius faced Rome in battle for the first time in the Battle of Silva Arsia. The battle was a close one, with Tarquinius at the head of a powerful Etruscan infantry; in the end, however, Rome would prove victorious, protecting the young Republic.

There were brutal losses on both sides, however. In addition to the thousands of infantry deaths on both sides, Rome lost one of its leading lights—Brutus himself, the stalwart consul of Rome, died in the battle. On Tarquinius's side, the personal losses were no less bitter, as the king's own son, Aruns, fell during the conflict.

Tarquinius was not giving up, though. He would turn to yet another ally, leading to another military conflict and the actual siege of Rome. It would be the first time the young Republic came close to actual defeat. In some accounts, Tarquinius's ally actually succeeded in occupying the powerful city for a time. We will explore both narratives and the epic struggle that ensued through this next stand of the Tarquinius against the Roman Republic.

Lars Porsena

After his defeat in the Battle of Silva Arsia, the last king of Rome took refuge with another king—Porsena, the king of Clusium. Clusium was a powerful Etruscan city at the time and a powerful ally for the deposed Tarquinius. Lars Porsena was ambitious, too, and more than ready to face Rome.

According to Roman historian, Titus Livius, Lars Porsena was easily convinced by arguments from Tarquinius' camp. These entreaties included the importance of protecting the sanctity of kings, as well as the crucial value of having an Etruscan king on the Roman throne. Lars Porsena threw his lot in with Tarquinius and advanced his army against Rome.

It is said that this coming threat was unprecedented in the history of Rome. The aristocracy saw Porsena's advance as a double threat—not only was his army the most powerful they had ever faced, they also had their own people to fear. The patricians were worried that the plebs would turn on them and surrender to Porsena, admitting Tarquinius to the city. Because of this, the patricians began to make immediate concessions to the plebeians. (This started a pattern that would come to head in the Conflict of Orders, which we will discuss in the next chapter.) Next, the powers that be in Rome began stockpiling food and dispatched commissioners to nearby cities to gather supplies. The Roman state also seized control of salt production and relived the plebs of the heavy tax obligations they would bear as a result of the coming war. This extreme generosity on the part of the wealthy aristocrats of Rome was a stroke of genius in many ways, rallying the common people to their side and unifying the people of the city against Tarquinius and the coming siege. This concession, however, would set the precedent and allow the plebs to claim more and more power in years to come.

As Porsena's forces approached the city, the people in the surrounding countryside fled into the protective walls of the city, putting further strain on the supplies of Rome. The geography and walls of Rome put it in good stead. Bridges provided access to Rome at various points, but also served as key points of defense against the incursion.

One such conflict at a bridge is the stuff of legend in the history of this

battle and concerns one brave man, Horatius Cocles. Horatius was on guard at the Sublician bridge as the Etruscan troops approached. Terrified by the size of the army, Horatius' men fled toward the walls of the city, leaving him to face off against the Etruscans on his own. It is said he called after them, attempting to rally them to his side and telling them that if they failed to stand now they would face far more soldiers eventually within the walls of Rome. Despite his inspirational rallying cry, only two soldiers remained with him, Lartius and Hermanius. With the help of these two brave men, Horatius managed to fend off the Etruscan horde for a time. According to historical legend, Horatius fought bravely before diving into the river finally and managing to evade the arrows of the enemy.

Through brave standoffs like this and the natural protections afforded Rome by its geographical setting, Rome was able to fend off this first assault. Porsena was a canny and intelligent leader and understood the "dangerous underbelly" of Rome's setting. While it could protect the city, it could also cut it off. Instead of launching a new assault, therefore, Porsena determined to run a blockade against the city, starving out the population and army. He set up troops to intercept any crops going into the city. All Roman cattle outside the city walls that could be saved were driven into the city walls by the Romans to protect this key source of food.

The Roman Consul, Valerius, conceived of a brilliant plan to use these cattle to ambush the Etruscans. He ordered a large number of cattle to be driven out the Esquiline gate with the hopes that this enormous prize would attract a large number of Etruscan troops to the spot. Until then, the Etruscans had been divided into smaller sorties, making it difficult for the Romans to make any significant impact with an attack. The ruse worked, attracting a high volume of Etruscan soldiers to the Esquiline gate. Roman troops were there in preparation and won a great round against the Etruscan invaders, significantly reducing their numbers.

This clever plan did not break the entire blockade, however. The brutality and injustice of the blockade offended one young member of the Roman aristocracy in particular, a nobleman known as Mucius. This brave Roman decided of his own volition to sneak into the Etruscan camp with the hopes of assassinating Lars Porsena and went to the Senate with his plan. With their approval, he made his foray into the camp. Mucius managed to reach Porsena's tent, only to be confused by the close resemblance between Porsena and his secretary. As such, Mucius accidentally stabbed the wrong man and was

captured while trying to escape. When brought before the king, young Mucius declared that nothing would break his spirit or Rome's and is said to have placed his hand in a nearby fire to show his resolve.

Lars Porsena was so impressed by this young man's bravery that he let him go. Upon his return to Rome, Mucius was honored by the city. His foray into the enemy camp brought fortune to the city as well as him; shaken by Rome's various successes against the blockade and by his near assassination, Lars Porsena decided it was time to propose peace.

While the two sides negotiated peace, including the return of some lands to the Tarquins, another brave Roman, it is said, took a stand against the Etruscans. A young Roman woman, Cloelia, was one of a number of Roman women held hostage by Porsena's army. This brave woman led her sister hostages out of camp late one night, escaping in a rain of javelins across the river. She and her fellow hostages made it safely back to Rome, but their escape came close to disturbing the peace negotiations. As a gesture, Rome offered to return Cloelia to Lars Porsena. Upon her return to the enemy camp, the Etruscan king became so impressed with her character and bravery that he told her she could choose half of the remaining Roman hostages to send back to Rome. Cloelia chose the youngest children, further cementing her as a person of character and virtue in Roman legend.

Porsena would make one last attempt to get Tarquinius back on the throne of Rome. After the peace had been finalized, he sent a final envoy to the city to make one last request on Tarquinius' behalf. Rome responded by sending their most honored senators as an embassy to Porsena. This dramatic gesture was done to make it clear to the Etruscan king—they valued peace with him, but under no conditions would they concede to having a king in Rome ever again. Seeing that there was no chance for Tarquinius, Lars Porsena restored key territories to Rome that they had lost during the peace negotiations and asked Tarquinius to withdraw. The last king of Rome departed, traveling to the property of his son-in-law in Tusculum.

This is the account of the siege of Rome by Lars Porsena, at least as it was passed down from Roman historians. Some modern scholars now believe that Lars Porsena may have been more successful than Roman historians let on and may have occupied the mighty city for at least a portion of time. What is of note, however, is that despite this success, he at no time placed Tarquinius back on the throne. The defeat of the last king of Rome seemed final... unless of course one considers exactly how stubborn that king was.

Tarquinius's Last Stand

Despite failing not once, but three times to regain the throne of Rome, Tarquinius had—remarkably—one last attempt in him. After spending a few years of quiet time in Tusculum with his son-in-law, Octavius Mamilius, Tarquinius managed to convince Octavius to lead a collection of Latin troops against Rome. Ironically, it was because of the threat of attack by this deposed king that Rome appointed its first dictator of the Republic in Albus Postumius Albus. Tarquinius and his only surviving son rode with the party along with a small collection of exiles who had left the city with Tarquinius originally. This "Latin League" faced off against Rome in a gruesome battle at Lake Regillus. The losses on both sides were once again enormous—Mamilius was killed and both the Master of the Horse of Rome and Tarquinius' son were seriously injured. Rome came out victorious in the end. With this final defeat and with the death of his last ally, Tarquinius finally at long last gave up on his quest to retake the Roman throne. He receded to Cumae, where he would spend his last years in the court of Aristodemus and pass away just a few years later in 495 B.C.

II

The Consolidation of the Republic



With the endless battles against Tarquinius at long last resolved, Rome would face a new series of conflicts within its own walls. Consolidating the Republic into a unified, functioning entity would require some birthing pains. The long suffering commoners of Rome would slowly but surely demand more power from the ruling class of patricians, redefining Roman society and government in a long, civil struggle known as The Conflict of the Orders. Through the two centuries it would take to consolidate the Republic, the plebeians would go from limited power to an equal share of power in the government.



The Political Structure of the Roman Republic

Before delving into the Conflict of Orders and looking at how Rome evolved on its social issues, it can help to first examine and understand the political structure of the young Republic. In its beginnings, the Roman Republic had created and relied on the Law of the Twelve Tables to define law and justice in the city-state. This core "document" would undergo a number of changes throughout the Republic before becoming all but obsolete by the end of the Republic.

The Roman Senate of the Republic

As in the days of the Roman king, the senate was at the heart of the Roman government in the Republic. Without a king, however, the senate wielded a good deal more control. The senate passed decrees known as *senatus consulta*, which served as advisory documents for magistrates. While qualified as "advisory" these documents more often than not were approved by the magistrate and made into law. The senate in the Roman Republic also exercised a good deal of control over foreign policy and the military. As the Republic progressed, the legislative assemblies would lose power, further consolidating the authority of the Roman senate.

The Legislative Assemblies

Rome at the time of the young Republic maintained two types of legislative assemblies, the *comitia* and the *concilia*. The former were assemblies consisting of all proper citizens of Rome (known as "*optimo jure*") while the latter were assemblies of specific subsets of the citizenry. In earliest Rome, these subsets were defined by Patrician families. Over the time of the Republic, these definitions would transfer over to centuries and tribes, freeing the common people from the authority of the Patrician families. The *Comitia Centuriata*, the soldier's assembly, wielded enormous power in the young Republic, electing magistrates with *imperium* authority, such as consuls and

praetors, as well as censors. This body also had primary authority when it came to declaring war and served as the highest court in the land.

The Comitia Tributa, on the other hand, was governed by a single consul and consisted of various tribes. "Tribe" in the Roman sense translates more directly as "district" as these groups were primarily based on geography. This legislative assembly oversaw the election of quaestors and military tribunes. Finally, a Plebeian Council functioned much like the Comitia Tributa but did not include the Patrician class. It is the role of this Plebeian Council and its authority that would come define much of the transition Rome experienced as it perfected its Republic.

Executive Magistrates

Executive magistrates within the Republic could hold any number of constitutional powers. These were conferred on a magistrate by the Plebeian and Patrician councils. Perhaps most interesting was the power of omen. All magistrates were bound by duty to look for omens as they might relate to legal matters and public affairs. Magistrates and their influencers would often use the power of omen to prophesize against political opponents, making Roman debate an interesting affair.

Magistrates also held the power of coercion, which they could use against any Roman citizen to maintain public order. Rome did provide its citizens with a defense against this manhandling however in the form of something known as a "provocatio". Much like today's due process, this measure gave the citizen the right to a hearing or appeal against a magistrate's act of coercion.

Finally, magistrates could also bear the constitutional power of imperium. This power was limited to magistrates serving as either consul or praetor and gave that magistrate the power to call together the armed forces. Given these high stakes, this was obviously a very carefully bestowed honor and power and limited at first only to Patricians. Over time, the Plebeians would lobby for and earn the right to ascend to consulship.

The term of a consul's service was one year, but it was a year of supreme power over the civil and military structure of Rome. Consuls

in Rome presided over all assemblies and the senate, while consuls outside the city commanded the armed forces.

Praetors, on the other hand, had more provincial authority. A Roman praetor could establish civil law inside the walls of Rome or even command provincial armies, but wielded nowhere near the supreme authority of the Consul.

Another key magisterial position within the Roman government in the time of the Republic was the position of censor. Rome elected two censors every five years who served 18-month terms. These censors were responsible for conducting the Roman census and, more importantly, either admitting or eliminating citizens from the senate. Finally, quaestors and aediles performed financial and civil duties respectively, helping to keep the busy bureaucracy of Rome running.

The Conflict of Orders

At the start of the Conflict in 495 B.C., the status quo was still very much in place, though the plebeians had enjoyed some concessions until then sporadically. The Patricians were still the elite class, and all other Romans were prevented from joining this aristocracy. Only being born into a Patrician family earned you a place and Patricians were banned from marrying Plebeians eliminating a common form of social blending.

Most significantly perhaps, Plebeians were also banned from electing their own officials. This issue came to a head in 494 B.C., sparking the beginning of what would become the Conflict of Orders. At the time, Rome was facing yet another war with regional tribes. Having the Plebs on their side was key for the Patricians as Plebeian soldiers comprised an enormous part of the army. When the time came to march out against the enemy, the Plebeian soldiers went on strike, retreating to a site outside the city known as the Sacred Mount. Using this powerful leverage, the Plebeians demanded that they be allowed to elect their own representatives within the government. Faced with fighting a war with practically no manpower, the Patricians had to cede the point and granted the Plebs the right to elect their own tribune plebis, or plebeian tribunes.

Things once more came to a head a few decades later, when the Plebeians decided that the time had come to push the point a bit

further. Now that they had tribunal representation, the Plebeians now wanted magisterial office. A tribune plebis was a magistrate in show, but elected solely by the Plebs and therefore limited in power. The people of Rome now wanted the ability to elect Pleb magistrates in full and also wanted the right to stand a Pleb for election as Consul, which was essentially the chief magistrate in the government. The issue was debated in the Senate extensively, but ultimately the Roman senate refused to cede the point. Instead, the Senate decided to bestow imperium upon a limited number of military tribunes from the Plebeian class, while still limiting access to the Consul position. These military tribunes effectively had consular powers, but the senate ultimately had the right to veto the election of any of these tribunes, further limiting Plebeian power.

The Conflict of Orders also saw sizeable changes to the nature of the Plebeian Assembly and its powers. One of the first significant changes came in 471 B.C. when the senate passed a law allowing Plebeians to organize by tribe. This eliminated the Patrician obligation that had formerly defined Plebeian organization in the assembly and made the Plebeians politically independent from the aristocracy.

Another series of conflicts with regional tribes around the year 400 B.C. put further strain on the relationship between the Patricians and Plebeians. During these campaigns, the Plebeians did much of the dirty work, of course, fighting on the battlefield and waging war. The Patricians, meanwhile, reaped all the resulting benefits of these victories, keeping any property or wealth won during the conflicts. Infuriated by this inequality, the Plebeians demanded new concessions, pushing through what would become known as the Licinio-Sextian law, named after the two tribunes who championed the law. This law limited ownership of any public land earned during a conquest to 320 acres per person, thereby limiting how much a patrician could seize for himself. It also defined limits for cattle and sheep kept on public pastures so that Patricians could not dominate this other key agrarian industry. Finally, the law declared that one of the two annually elected Consuls should come from the Plebeians.

There was an important cultural shift happening between Plebs and Patricians, as well. Marriage between the two classes was becoming more acceptable and appropriate. In 445 B.C., the tribune Gaius Canuleius established the Lex Canuleia, which declared that marriage between Plebs and Patricians was now legal and that children of those marriages could now inherit their father's social status. This allowed for more flexibility in Roman society and was in direct opposition to

the conventions established by the Law of the Twelve Tables historically.

The middle of that century saw yet another significant shift in power for the Plebeians, giving them authority over the Patricians in some ways for the first time. Over the 4th century. B.C., Rome established a series of reforms known as the *leges Valeriae Horatiae*. These reforms gave the Plebeian Council legal authority over Patricians as well as Plebeians. The last in these reforms removed the final oversight Patricians had over Plebeians in the senate and gave Plebeian tribunes legitimate authority for the first time, essentially bringing the Patrician Era to an end.

The Succession to the Janiculum Hill

While Plebeians were gaining more power, they were still struggling under financial burdens. What's more, much of the Plebeian indebtedness made them obligated to Patricians who funded the majority of loans in Rome. This financial imbalance pushed the Conflict to the limit once more in 287 B.C. The Plebeians made a request to the senate for debt relief and were summarily refused by the Patricians. In response, the Plebeians seceded to Janiculum Hill. In response, Rome elected a dictator, one Quintus Hortensius. To heal the situation, Hortensius passed the monumental Hortensian law, which eliminated the Patricians' ability to veto Plebeian law.

The Plebeians now had a de facto right to become either Censor or Dictator of Rome. Within just a few decades, Rome saw its first Plebeian dictator and, two decades later, its first plebeian praetor in the form of one Q. Pubillius Philo. During this era, the Plebeian tribunes became indispensable allies to Patrician senators who saw the need to curry Plebeian favor. This close relationship eventually made the Tribune a key position, establishing it as a necessary role in any ambitious man's ascension up the Roman political ladder.

All of these political changes also transformed Roman society. Rome became a much more socially fluid place. While it was still rare for anyone from an ignoble family to rise to high office, men of great ambition and with large personalities could do just that on occasion. In time, the ruling class became a Patricio-Plebeian class with a small number of Plebeian families wielding the same social standing as the old Patrician ones. With Plebeians gaining access to more of the plunder of war as well, these lower caste citizens were also able to afford expensive elections and the social niceties required to ascend in Rome. Rome was slowly becoming a more pluralistic and fluid society.

The Expansion of the Republic

Conflicts with neighboring tribes had defined Rome from its earliest days. During the Republic, these regional conflicts would serve to defend Rome but also to expand its influence far beyond the walls of the city, eventually extending across the entire peninsula of Italy.

Rome began its push out into Italy during the first century of the Republic in the 5th century B.C. The Battle of Lake Regillus against the Latin League which we discussed earlier was one of the first major battles of this period and defined Rome's momentum during this period. Rome would continue on this path, defeating regional tribes one by one in sequence.

The Battle of Mons Algidus set Rome against two of its most impressive enemies at the time—the Volsci and the Aequi. The earliest rumblings of this conflict came in 459 B.C. when the Aequi occupied the city of Tusculum and Rome sent troops to defend the city in response. Rome was successful in freeing the captured city and forced a truce on the Aequi. Only a year later, however, the Aequi would violate that truce and attack Tusculum once more, while a Sabine army moved against Rome. This two-pronged attack forced Rome's hand, and the city went into a state of war, electing Consul Cincinnatus as dictator of Rome.

Cincinnatus led a surprisingly large number of troops against the Aequi, building a wall around their camp to enclose them. Unable to fend off the attack, the Aequi were forced once more to surrender to Rome.

The next major battle of the century was the Battle of Corbione, which pitted Rome against the Aequi once again. Rome was successful this time as well, confirming once and for all Rome's dominance over this troublesome tribe.

Prior to this final battle between Rome and Aequi, the Roman Republic had to face off against another significant regional enemy in the Battle of the Cremera. This battle set Rome against the powerful Etruscan city of Veii. Previous conflicts had fallen in Rome's favor, but this battle saw Rome's sound defeat. The battle was waged by the Gens Fabii in lieu of the Republican forces. All of this family was

massacred in the conflict, save the youngest boy. Despite this defeat, Rome would go on to eventually subjugate all local tribes, giving Rome a more powerful position from which to face other local threats, including the hill tribes of the Apennine region.



The Gallic Tribes

Rome would find a much more formidable enemy in the Gallic tribes that were swarming into Italy from the north. By the start of the 4th century B.C. the Gallic hordes had made significant headway into the North, invading two key Etruscan towns. Rome was forced to rally to save these Etruscan allies and had to face the Gauls in battle. The Battle of Allia River took place somewhere between 390 and 387 B.C. This conflict would be one of the first great wounds against the Republic. An interesting side note to this battle is that it actually took place on the same day as the Battle of Cremera in the past century, marking the day as a day of ill omen for Rome. For the omen-believing Romans, this "Dies Alliensis" would remain a day on which to avoid all battles and campaigns.

Despite facing off against the Gauls with 15,000 troops, Rome was defeated by the Gauls, who then chased them back to the city walls. The Gauls and their chief, Brennus, actually managed to sack Rome. There are many anecdotes from this siege that have been passed down to us by Roman historians such as Livy. One such tale is the story of M. Manilus, a soldier and former Consul. As with many stories passed down from this era, this story is a unique blend of legend and history.

In this tale, the Gauls were endeavoring to ascend the hill in Rome leading to the temple of Carmentis in the dead of the night. So quiet was there ascent that they disturbed neither dog nor man. Luckily for Rome, a gaggle of geese had been left alive in the area, despite a shortage of food, due to the fact that these birds were sacred to Juno. The noisy flock reacted to the Gaul approach, awakening Manilus, whoran to gather nearby men to arms. Manilus bravely faced off against the Gauls and, with the help of the eventual reinforcements, defeated them.

How the sacking of Rome was resolved ultimately is up for contention. Some believe the Romans drove the Gauls out with a military surge, but there are those historians who believe that Rome succeeded only after they offered the Gauls a sizeable bribe to leave the city. Whatever the case, the Gauls would be one of the primary deterrents faced by Rome as it sought to expand its reach across Italy.

Despite the wrench thrown in the works by the Gauls, Rome came back quickly from the sack of the city and continued to overcome tribes around the Italian peninsula. Rome would next face off against the Samnites, waging war against this tribe for four decades in the middle of the 4th century. During the First Samnite War, Rome managed to soundly beat the Samnites, but failed to finalize that conquest due to an alternate conflict with the Latins, who Rome defeated in both the Battle of Vesuvius and the Battle of Trifanum. This distraction proved productive for Rome, however, forcing the Latins to submit to the rule of Rome ultimately.

Rome would have a second chance to conquer the Samnites in the Second Samnite War. This conflict went on for two decades from 327 to 304 B.C. with the advantage swinging dramatically from the Romans to the Samnites and then back again time after time. It was not until halfway through the conflict that Rome had enough success against the Samnites to make demands on the tribe. Rome's victory seemed certain by 304 B.C. but the Samnites still had some fight in them. The tribe turned to various tribes around the region who held a grudge against Rome and unified them against the city.

Rome fought against this group in the Battle of Populonia in what would become the Third Samnite War. Despite the group of tribes in coalition against the Republic, Rome managed to win and finalized its conquest of the Etruscans of Italy.

While it had taken nearly a century, Rome had succeeded in achieving

full dominance over most of the Italian peninsula. This gave the Republic an international reputation and also redefined its ambitions on a much larger geographic scale. The stakes would get higher and higher for the Republic as it sought to win against much larger enemies, including Greece and Carthage.

Facing Greece

With most of the Italian peninsula under its control, Rome turned its ambitious eye on the wider Mediterranean region. Its first major enemy in the Mediterranean would be a powerful Greek general, Pyrrhus. Today, most of us know him via the phrase "Pyrrhic victory" which defines a victory only in name. While he would enjoy some significant successes in his campaigns against Rome, most of them caused such major losses to his side that they could not truly be considered victories.

Pyrrhus was a distant relative of Alexander the Great, perhaps influencing his ambitions as a leader. Whatever his motivations, Pyrrhus believed he had real opportunities available to him in Italy, where he envisioned establishing his own mini empire of sorts.

His first foray into Italy came in 280 B.C. when he landed 25,000 troops on the peninsula in the South, which had traditionally been under Greek control.

Rome took his presence seriously and battles quickly ensued. While Pyrrhus' military presence was significant, Rome refused to negotiate, viewing his presence on the Italian peninsula as inexcusable. The two sides would go head to head for several years, culminating in the Battle of Beneventum in 275 B.C. Historians declare this battle a draw, but Pyrrhus and his troops were exhausted; realizing he had little momentum left and that foreign campaigns had drained his soldiers, Pyrrhus made the final decision to leave Italy for Greece.

Rome's victory over this Greek aggressor defined the Republic as a premier presence in the Mediterranean. Rome had proven it was powerful enough to wage war on an international scale. With all of Italy now under its authority and a serious military reputation in its back pocket, Rome would now face one of its greatest enemies to date—Carthage.

The Punic Wars

The Punic Wars would be a transformative experience for Rome, but also for the Mediterranean region. Until these two enormous powers faced off, the "world" at the time (namely the Mediterranean region) had never seen a war so large and destructive. This series of three wars would cause the death of hundreds of thousands of soldiers on both sides. In the end, Rome would find itself the most powerful entity in the Mediterranean and well on its way to empire.

Carthage

In order to understand the Punic Wars, we can benefit first from getting to know Rome's enemy in this epic series of war—Carthage. Like Rome and many cities of the time, Carthage was a leading light in the Mediterranean with a mythological foundation myth. In contrast to Rome, however, Carthage's foundation centered on a very different figure from Romulus—a Queen, namely Queen Elissar.

Queen Elissar, who would come to be known as Queen Dido in the Western world, was originally a princess of Tyre. When her own brother sought to consolidate his power in the kingdom by killing her husband, a high priest in Tyre, Elissar fled the city for the North African coast.

Tyre was in what we now know as Lebanon, and was a part of what was then known as Phoenicia. Elissar's father is said to have been King Matten of Tyre. He bequeathed the throne to her and her younger brother, Pygmalion. According to the Roman historian, Justin, Elissar then married her uncle, a high priest named Acherbas who wielded much more power and wealth, ironically, than either of the new monarchs. Pygmalion, it is said, liked to have the most wealth and the most impressive reputation, so it was not long before this young king made his move against Acherbas, assassinating him in his temple. At first, he kept Elissar's suspicions at bay, but eventually she uncovered the truth. Horrified and afraid for her own life, Elissar fled to sea.

Pygmalion sent his fleet after her, more tempted by the gold she had

taken with her than anything else. When the Tyrian fleet caught up with the young Queen, she played her hand well, fully aware of what her brother's real goal was. She confronted the ships and told them she would cast all her gold into the sea if they took her ship. Faced with having to return to Tyre and tell the hotheaded young king that they had lost the gold he so wanted, the fleet decided to collude with Elissar instead.

Elissar continued sailing to the west with her now impressive fleet. After a brief stop on Cyprus, Elissar and her men finally landed in North Africa, where she managed to again use her wiles to establish Carthage. Queen Elissar petitioned a neighboring Libyan king for enough land on which to establish a small city. He granted her request, but was a bit sarcastic about it, saying she could have as much land as she could cover with the hide of an ox. Not one to be so easily dismissed, it is said Queen Elissar sliced the hide into very thin strips and managed to encircle the entire hill of Byrsa, providing more than enough land on which to build young Carthage.

Queen Elissar continued to grow her city; eventually the Libyan king sought her hand in marriage. Faced with being forced into marriage and ceding her growing queendom to the neighboring king, Queen Elissar instead chose suicide, ending the foundation myth of the city and the tale of this courageous woman.

The innovation, fight, and spirit resonant in the tale of Elissar would become emblematic of Carthage, a city that would come to dominate and excel across the region. All of these traits would become especially evident, too, when it came time for this Mediterranean power to face off with its key rival in the region—Rome.



Carthage in the Days of the Roman Republic

By the time of the Roman Republic, Carthage was a thriving port of trade, serving as a key port in Phoenician trade around the Mediterranean. It was part of a network of Phoenician cities that ran from Iberia across North Africa and through the Middle East up to the Black Sea. This network served as financial protection against tributes owed by certain Phoenician cities, but also protected against Greek domination around the Mediterranean. With the rise of the Roman Republic, this Phoenician trade empire had a new and vital threat.

Carthage was also important to the Phoenician trade network because it served as a stop and port of safety between the Phoenician cities in the east and mineral resources owned by the Phoenicians in Iberia. Along with stops in Sicily and Sardinia, Carthage served to protect this vital interest.

For much of Phoenician history up until the Punic Wars, Carthage had played second or even third fiddle to Tyre. After the destruction of that city by Alexander the Great, Carthage eventually became the most important city in the Phoenician collection of trade colonies. This caused an important shift in how the Phoenicians exercised control over their colonies. While Tyre had demanded a tribute from distant colonies in places such as Iberia, it had never exercised political control over these places. Carthage changed that, assigning Carthaginian magistrates in colonies and exercising much more control. This new domination of the colonies would eventually alienate many colonies, especially the ones in Iberia, some of which would even through their allegiance behind Rome during the eventual wars.

It is no surprise that Carthage would behave that way—it was after all the wealthiest city in the region thanks to the Phoenician trade network that dominated the Mediterranean. The Phoenicians built much of this wealth through food, textiles, and even slaves, as well as tin, silver, gold, and dyes. While these goods put the trade empire in good stead at the time, it has left little in the way of the archaeological record to testify for this empire to this day. It is for this reason as well as its eventual defeat by the Romans that the Carthaginians and their Phoenician empire do not exist as prominently in our minds as Rome does today.

The First Punic War

At the start of the First Punic War in 264 B.C., Rome and Carthage had very different advantages. Carthage's main advantage came in the form of its navy, which was skilled and dominated the Mediterranean. Rome at the time had no such skills on the open sea. Rome did, however, have a professional army that had been honed since the start of the Republic. Carthage's forces consisted of mainly mercenary types, making their armed forces not only costly but also potentially disloyal.

Because of its naval power, Carthage had a presence on both Northern Africa in what we now know as Tunisia as well as in Southern Spain and Sicily. North Africa and Sicily would see the majority of land battles during the First Punic War. Most of the conflicts, however, would take part at sea, throwing most of the advantage to Carthage's side.

The first major conflict of that war came in the Battle of Agrigentum. As a land battle, it was an easy victory for Rome and convinced Carthage to drive the battlefield out into the Mediterranean Sea. It actually began as a siege of the city but, after significant suffering on both sides due to cut-off supplies on the part of the Carthaginians and disease on the Roman side, the armies agreed to open battle. Rome won the day and took the city, but the Carthaginian forces managed to get away to fight another day.

Rome's navy was seriously lacking at the start of this conflict. Rome brought its intelligence and wile to the open sea, however, and managed to define the First Punic War on its own terms, despite Carthage's naval dominance.

Rome's major innovation came in the invention of the corvus. This assault bridge on a ship helped Rome overcome the fact that Carthage's navy was so very large and allowed Rome to leverage its infantry during sea battles. The corvi attached to Roman ships proved themselves worthy during the Battle of Mylae. With corvi attached to their ships, Rome was able to seize the first 30 enemy ships they approached. Carthage's only defense against the corvi-reinforced ships was to engage in extensive maneuvers. Despite these maneuvers, Carthage ended up losing 20 more ships before the battle was lost and Carthage retreated.

The next arena of battle took place on Sicily as Rome and Carthage each struggled to take key holdings from the other side. Rome ended up victorious on this land campaign, giving it the ability and momentum to then move into North Africa.

Rome had tired of endless sieges and sought to end the war once and for all. By attacking Carthage, Rome could end Carthage's hold and supremacy in the Mediterranean. Rome prepared an enormous fleet to sail toward North Africa and managed to defeat 350 Carthaginian ships in the Battle of Cape Ecnomus. What followed was a series of land defeats as Rome moved onto and into North Africa.

Carthage managed to swing some momentum back in their favor by hiring a mercenary, Xanthippus. He led a restructured Carthaginian army to battle against Rome at the Battle of Tunis, managing to capture the Roman general, Regulus, and cut off Rome from a key supply route.

Excepting this Carthage victory at the Battle of Tunis, Rome was the dominant force for the remainder of the war, switching the arena of war back to Sicily and continuing to take key Carthaginian cities there. By the end of the First Punic War in 241 B.C., the Roman Republic was without a doubt the most powerful nation in the region.

The Second Punic War

The Second Punic War is perhaps the most iconic because of the involvement of one Carthaginian general and the astonishing choices he made while waging war against Rome. His name was Hannibal Barca and his legendary escapade on the back of elephants across the

Alps remains one of wartime's most iconic endeavors to this day. Hannibal was meant to be a remarkable enemy of Rome, as according to the legend, he had pledged, before the Baal's altar in the same Carthage city, eternal hate to the Romans when he was a child of barely nine years old before accompanying his father to the conquest of Iberia.

The Second Punic War was fought across multiple theaters, including Hispania, the North of Italy, and Sicily. Complicating the war for Rome was the fact that the Republic was also engaged in a second war with the advent of the First Macedonian War against Macedon in the North of Greece.

The first rumblings of the Second Punic War came when the Carthaginians faced off against the Romans in Hispania in 219 B.C. Hannibal followed this up quickly with his famous voyage across the Alps, leading Iberians from the Spanish region into battle with Rome and towing along enormous siege engines with the help of his elephants. While most of the elephants and all of the siege engines were destroyed en route, it remains one of the most memorable, if foolhardy, efforts man has ever undertaken in war

Once in Italy proper, Hannibal was marginally successful against the Romans, winning in the Battle of the Trebia, the Battle of Lake Trasimene, and the Battle of Cannae between 218 B.C. and 216 B.C. Without his precious siege engines, however, designed to destroy and overcome the mighty walls of Rome, he could never take the city itself.

The Battle of the Trebia was the first major conflict once Hannibal reached the Italian Peninsula. It took place at the end of 218 BC as winter set upon the region. Through the military genius that had made Hannibal a legend in his lifetime, Hannibal managed to serve up a huge defeat to the Romans. Despite having the larger forces on the field, Rome lost primarily due to the short temper of the Roman general, Tiberius Sempronius Longus, who led his troops directly into Hannibal's trap without any forethought.

Hannibal played to Roman arrogance once more in the spring of 217 B.C. as he faced off with another impulsive Roman general, Flaminius. A first attempt to taunt Flaminius into open battle involved destroying the countryside around Etruria. When this failed, Hannibal instead turned to his tactical genius. Marching around Rome's left flank, Hannibal managed to incite Flaminius into an immediate pursuit.

Flaminus failed to send ahead scouts or do any reconnaissance and ended up ambushed by Hannibal in the Battle of Lake Trasimene. This battle decimated the majority of the Roman forces and killed Flaminus himself, while Hannibal's forces experienced few losses.

Having eradicated the many land army standing between his army and Rome, Hannibal now had the opportunity to attack the great city. In a major misstep, however, he second guessed himself, choosing instead to travel south in search of allies amongst the Greek and Italic tribes at the tip of the Italian Peninsula.

Hannibal's foray into the south did not result in any key alliances. His next step was to take a supply depot located at Cannae, blocking off Rome from an important supply channel. In response, Rome raised the largest army yet—by some estimates, a 100,000-man army—and marched towards Hannibal's holding.

Once again, Rome's eagerness put it in a compromising position. The two consuls in charge of the force, Aemilius Paullus and Varro, marched their men into a position from which Hannibal could envelop them and limit the surface area of the battlefield, this eliminating the advantage Rome had in its larger army. Libyan mercenaries and Hannibal's calvary swept in as well, completely surrounding Rome. With nowhere near the number of men Rome had, Hannibal managed to once again rout the enormous Roman army, taking as many as 70,000 prisoners.

The seriousness of this defeat had other consequences for Rome. Key allies, such as Philip of Macedonia and King Hieronymous of Syracuse, turned against Rome. While Roman aggression had been Rome's Achilles heel, Hannibal's would prove to be his well-considered albeit hesitant approach to battle. Even with these new allies, Hannibal once again failed to take the initiative against Rome, wasting perhaps his last chance to take the city and win the war. This and the innovative response of Rome's Fabius would slow down the Second Punic War and eventually throw the advantage to Rome's side.

Rome's military leader and acting dictator Quintus Fabius Maximus was well aware of Hannibal's personality and struggles as a foreign army on the Italian Peninsula and played to these frailties. The way in which he responded to Hannibal is remembered to this day and canonized in our language with the phrase "Fabian strategy".

What Fabius' approach involved was essentially keeping the Roman

army out of open battle with Hannibal in the Italian countryside. By depriving Hannibal of open battle, Fabius also deprived him of the benefits of foraging and gaining access to any lucre of war. He essentially bled Hannibal dry bit by bit. The Republic was incapable of defeating him soundly with mere military might, however, so the war dragged on for over 15 years.

This approach worked, but it took a long time and was not popular with the bellicose people of Rome or with Fabius' own men. They began calling him the Cunctator, a miff that translates as something like the "delayer." A major fear for many in Rome was that this strategy of withdrawal, which included leaving the people of the countryside abandoned, might sway many to Hannibal's side in the end.

While it is easy to satirize or mischaracterize the Fabian strategy, especially given its modern context, it was a plan that took a great deal of wile and skill. Fabius had to march his troops along the heights, paralleling Hannibal without ever giving him the open terrain on which to face Rome he wanted and on which he excelled. These demands led to the development of a three-column marching formation, which would serve Romans well in battles to come.

Well into this slow and drawn-out conflict, one particularly iconic battle took place between Rome and Carthage as the latter sought to send reinforcements to Hannibal's side. This battle, known as the Battle of the Metaurus, faced Roman troops under the two consuls Gaius Nero and Marcus Livius against Hannibal's brother, Hasdrubal.

While historical accounts vary, modern consensus states that each side had around 30,000 troops on the battlefield that day. The initial momentum of the battle was on Hasdrubal's side as his mighty war elephants cut through the Roman lines. These war beasts were soon defeated, however, and the tide changed. A weak center of Iberians on the Carthaginian side was besieged at the front and rear by Livius and Nero's troops respectively. Chaos ensued for Carthage shortly thereafter; when all was lost, Hasdrubal plunged into the melee to meet a suicidal end. It is said that Nero then cleaved Hasdrubal's head from his body and threw it to Hannibal's camp. After the depths and shock of the carnage, Hannibal retired for a while to Bruttium.

The Second Punic War waged on after this epic battle. Fabius continued to harass Hannibal's force in this way for more than a decade, whittling away at their supplies and their esteem. Finally,

Rome took to the seas and attacked Carthage with the hopes of cutting Hannibal off irreparably from his home. Hannibal returned to North Africa to face off against the Romans and suffered one of his most bitter defeats in the Battle of Zama by Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus. The battle set Carthage against Rome on open land, each side manned with around 35,000 to 40,000 troops. It was the Roman cavalry that won the day, encircling the Carthaginian infantry after Carthage had led much of the battle. In the end, over 20,000 Carthaginian troops were dead and an equal amount captured, leaving Carthage in complete defeat and the Second Punic War at long last over.

The terms sued for at the end of the war were not kind on Carthage, crippling the Mediterranean power so that it would never dominate in the region again. In one odd twist of fate, Fabius bequeathed his estates to Carthage under the terms. In a move reminiscent of Fabian wile, Hannibal had previously prohibited his troops from pillaging Fabius' properties in an attempt to make him look bad or suspicious to his men. In the end, this type of strategy had only worked for Rome, and the city state was once more the dominant force across the Mediterranean region.

The Third Punic War

The victory of Rome would not be confirmed until the two mighty nations had waged yet another war. From 149 to 146 B.C., the nations fought one last time in the Third Punic War. This conflict took place primarily in North Africa, with Rome laying siege to Carthage for the duration of the war.

In the five decades between the Second and Third Punic Wars, Carthage had regained much of its wealth and power in the Mediterranean. What's more, Rome had incurred a good deal of wrath from Mediterranean neighbors in the Iberian Peninsula and in Greece. Rome had spent much of the time between the Second and Third Punic Wars dominating others in the region. It had dominated the Hellenic empire to the east through the Macedonian, Illyrian, and Syrian wars. It had also run over the people of Hispania to the West in its attempts to rule over the Mediterranean.

Carthage, meanwhile, had finally succeeded in paying off the debt it owed from the peace treaty of the Second Punic War and was on its

way back to rebuilding its trade empire. Despite its rise in the region, Carthage was experiencing regular raids from a neighboring nation known as Numidia in the run up to the Third Punic War. Under the peace negotiated after the Second Punic War, Carthage was obligated to take this issue to the Roman senate rather than engage in open battle against Numidia. Carthage, however, knew the Roman senate would rule in favor of Numidia and, believing its war obligation to Rome to be resolved, took the risk of warring against Numidia. This action enraged Rome, which considered Carthage still under its authority.

Rome began to escalate against Carthage, engaging in war-like public rhetoric and eventually making demands upon the North African nation. One such demand involved the surrender of hundreds of Carthaginian noble children to Rome to be held as hostages and even the destruction and relocation of the city inland. The demands became too extreme for Carthage and the nation began openly defying Rome's demands. Rome declared war and the Third Punic War was officially begun.

Carthage attempted to appease Rome from the get-go. One such attempt involved offering 300 noble children of Carthage as hostages to Rome in exchange for the city retaining its land and its ability to govern itself. This may have worked had not the Punic city, Utica, switched allegiance to Rome, providing ideal placement for nearly 80,000 Roman troops within easy distance of Carthage. With the power of this threat held over Carthage, Rome then escalated even further, demanding that the Carthaginians raze their own city and move it inland away from the coast—a move that would obviously significantly impact the economics of the city by cutting it off from the open sea.

Carthage refused and the siege of the North African city began. The siege would go on for three years, starving many Carthaginians. Rome maintained the advantage throughout the entire conflict, though Carthage got some good hits in. One such involved setting the Roman fleet ablaze with fire ships in the harbor. Carthage was also successful in the battle of Nepheris, leading to the replacement of the Roman consul at the time, Manilius, by one Calpurnius Piso. He, too, suffered a series of small defeats at Carthage's hands and was replaced, in turn by Scipio Aemilianus. He proved successful in the end, laying waste to Carthage and its citizens.

Rome's campaign did not take long in comparison to the Second War;

after only a three-year campaign of battle and siege, Rome had won. The long simmering conflict between these two Mediterranean powers was finally at an end, and Rome would ascend to its throne as the dominant force across the region.

Carthage was finally all but destroyed. At the end of the Third Punic War, there were only 50,000 Carthaginians left since most of the populace had died either in battle or from starvation. These few survivors were sold into slavery by Rome and the city itself was burned to the ground. Legend says that the Romans also sowed the ground at Carthage with salt, thereby destroying the chances of anyone ever growing anything there for generations. What was more likely the case is that the land was turned into public land and shared by farmers from the Italian Peninsula. The area thus became a major agricultural center for Rome, providing much of the grain the city state needed for years to come.

The sights were just as tragic for Carthage across the former Carthaginian Empire after the war. All territories were annexed to Rome. Cities in Mauretania were razed and rebuilt in the Roman spirit. Utica was established as the capital of the new Roman province of Africa.

All of this marked the end of Carthage. These holdings, however, would become a unique part of what was to come for Rome, namely in the rise of one powerful general who would come to represent the ego and ambition of the growing Republic—Julius Caesar.

The Rise of Julius Caesar

Almost one hundred years after the final resolution of the power struggle between Rome and Carthage, an individual would rise to power in Rome who would come to define the Republic in the minds of many for millennia to come.

Julius Caesar first rose to prominence for his military successes, successfully taming the Gauls who had historically caused such problems for the Republic. In fact, he went after conflict, convinced that a win against the Gauls was what he needed to rise to power in Rome.

He was not wrong. Having been appointed the proconsular Governor of Cisalpine Gaul in northern Italy after serving as praetor in the Iberian Peninsula, Caesar looked for every opportunity to fight it out with the Gauls. After two Gaul tribes to the north and east of Transalpine Gaul began migrating on a route that would take them near the borders of his territory, he used it as the thinnest of excuses to declare war.

Thus began the Gallic Wars, which would define Caesar as a man not to be tarried with in Rome. From 58 B.C. to 51 B.C. Caesar waged war against the Gauls. He experienced victory from the get go, winning battles in the first two years of the conflict and making his way all the way into Britain, a first for Rome. In response, rises one particularly resourceful Gaul, Vercingetorix, whose name roughly translates as "superior warrior king". Around 52 B.C., this chieftain began a new campaign of revolt against Rome and almost succeeded in changing the tide. Inspired by the resistance of the Carnutes, Vercingetorix sought to unify the tribes against Rome. Initially turned down by the nobles of Gaul, he managed to create a coalition and army of the poor and was declared their king. From this new position of power, Vercingetorix allied with other Gaul tribes and, for a time, caused a good deal of trouble for Caesar and Rome by pursuing a scorched earth policy that left Roman troops without resources in the region.

The Battle of Alesia set Vercingetorix's unified tribes against Caesar's forces; despite this powerful opposition, Caesar won handily, nonetheless, and brought the Gauls under Roman control for the very first time in the Republic's history. The Gauls would remain a loyal

faction within Rome's pluralistic society for centuries until the ultimate decline of the western empire in the 5th century A.D.

Caesar's military campaign in Britain and conquest of the Gauls placed him in good stead within the Republic's political structure, but also marked him as a threat to many of Rome's most powerful men. But he was well on his way to ultimate power even before his success to the northwest. In 59 B.C. Caesar became a power player in Rome's political system as a member of the First Triumvirate, which we will look at in detail in pages to come.



III

The Fall of the Republic



To better understand the fall of the Republic, we should circle back to a generation before Caesar's rise to observe the overall cultural and political arc of the first century B.C. in Rome. This period in Rome is known to many as the Crisis of the Roman Republic and defines a time of confusion, conflict and decline.

Modern scholars have many and varied theories about what caused this decline. From the bird's eye view, it seems clear that the center of such a rapidly expanding system could not hold. Moralists might cite the vast ambition and ego of Rome as exemplified by Caesar toward the end of the Crisis. To many, however, one of the most obvious causes of the chaos in the later days of the Roman Republic comes from one factor—the wealth inequality within Roman society.

The Late Republic's Distribution of Wealth

The Conflict of Orders had certainly brought *some* increase in equality between the classes. Given how outsized the gap in power and wealth was between the ruling class and the slave or average citizen of Rome, however, these adjustments still left a sizeable amount of inequality. The Roman "nobility" still ruled from a surreal isolation from reality. The vast money they had was spent on decadence: parties, festivals, games. While much of this was done in the spirit of the "public good", the decadence of these events only highlighted the gaps between wealthy and poor. Many Patricians did use their wealth for public works, including the construction of infrastructure elements such as public buildings and aqueducts, but by and large, Roman wealth went to decadence, a problem that would only become exacerbated in the days of Empire.

The common people of Rome, on the other hand, were doing the heavy lifting of course. They provided the food, the goods, and—perhaps most bitterly—the bodies for labor and for war. War was key to the expansion of the Roman Republic, and the average Roman felt keenly the burden these campaigns had placed on the Roman citizen.

What's more, as we discussed earlier, as campaigns were won and enemies conquered, a good deal of the conquered wealth went to the state and to the Patricians. While the Plebs had worked to ensure some balance through law in the distribution of this wealth, the truth is that these laws were often ignored or overlooked, with the Patricians relying on their connections and power to overshadow these egalitarian laws. Lucre, property, and gold from war still lined the pockets of Rome's wealthiest, increasing the wealth gap even more.

Another result of all this combat was the hostage, which would become the Roman slave. After years of campaigning across Italy and then the Mediterranean, Rome had an enormous slave class, with some estimates placing it at one-fourth of the entire Roman population. All of this free labor allowed the wealthy to build enormous farms and manufactories which, like the "big box" stores of today, bled smaller enterprises dry, thus throwing more wealth to the top of Rome.

This shift, in turn, took Rome away from the stable and true economic growth produced by skill and innovation; Rome was quickly becoming a place where wealth was obtained almost magically. Wage a war—get free labor! A new estate! Much like the Internet or trading wealth of today, Rome's money became ephemeral and was no longer the result of truly measurable actions or assets.

On a social level, this enormous slave population of course introduced more dissatisfaction and rancor into Roman society, a place where one in every four people had to suffer the shame of being wholly owned by another. This discord in the ranks would only increase through the years of the Crisis and into the days of Empire.

With this wealth inequality came outsized egos as well. Being a wealthy man during the Crisis of the Roman Republic was a double-edged sword. If you were wealthy, you had the means to wage civil war (as Caesar and others demonstrated) and the ability to declare yourself the ultimate power in Rome. The flip side of this was that the higher you rose the bigger a target you became. Wealthy men, in fact, were often targeted by other ambitious Romans, their homes destroyed, their estates razed, and their money confiscated.

Rome had become in many ways the most civilized culture in the region; in other ways, it was becoming the 'Wild West'.

The Stages of the Roman Republic's Decline

The descent of the Roman Republic is obviously a complicated affair, but we can fairly divide and conquer the facts to a degree. While everything from economic inequality to slave rebellions played their parts in the Republic's demise, the Fall of the Republic from 133 to 27 B.C. can be divided into four eras. We will look at each in detail, but let's begin by getting an overview of them in summary. Understanding these eras in the gestalt can help us maintain perspective on this complex story.

The Ascension of the Plebeians

As with the Conflict of Orders, the rise of the Plebeians during the Republic would be a game changer. Much of this change would come through two key tribunes, the Gracchus brothers. These men would serve as advocates for the people and were the first true populists of the Republic. Their actions would also frustrate the Patricians, who fought back against the populist revolution and ultimately destroyed these two men. The Gracchi reforms transformed Roman society, the economy, and the military, and gave the people the momentum they needed to question the oligarchs, destabilizing the Republic.

The Privatization of the Army

Many populist reforms involved bestowing census and, as a result, military enrollment upon poorer Roman citizens. While this was done initially in the spirit of giving the poor more opportunity, eventually it would come to serve powerful men. Generals such as Sulla and Marius would use these shifts in military culture to recruit their own armies, paying poorer Romans to essentially serve as their own personal armies of mercenaries. The loyalty of the military would shift bit by bit from the state to various rich men, priming Rome for civil war and further destabilizing the Republic.

The First Triumvirate

Three of these powerful, wealthy men would come together in the middle of the first century B.C. to establish the first triumvirate over Rome. These enormous egos would wield their personal armies against one another in the end and turn the governance of Rome into their own personal playground. Pompey Magnus, Caesar, and Licinius Crassus would go from working together to attempting to destroy one another in their blood-thirsty quest to become the most powerful men in Rome. This disregard for the Republic and the way in which these men redefined the rules of law marked the beginning of the end of the Republic.

Caesar as Dictator

Finally, the dictatorship of Caesar, while brief, would serve as the straw that broke the Roman Republic's back. Using the excuse that he wished to restore balance to the Republic, Caesar declared himself dictator for 10 years, though he would only survive two. His attempt to rule as a divine king over Rome would remind too many of the early days of Rome before the Republic when one king ruled with an iron fist over a sham of a democracy. Declaring himself dictator in perpetuity only two years into his reign, Caesar set himself on a path of destruction and ultimately took the Republic down with him. Even his powerful grandnephew, Octavian, who would succeed him couldn't preserve the Republic as it had once existed.

These four stages are an easy way to visualize the story of the decline of the Roman Republic. As we begin to look at each in greater detail, we can see however exactly how rich and complex the story of the Roman Republic was. It was a place struggling to embrace a new world and a new way of life with a rising populace and a teetering oligarchy. This dramatic tale of a conflict between classes and the ambitions of dangerous men makes for some of the most compelling history in the ancient world.

Economic and Social Causes for Political Instability in the Republic

What is common during all of these stages of the decline of the Roman Republic is growing instability within the political structure of Rome. There were a number of economic and social causes behind this stability which related to everyone from the lowliest peasant to the richest Roman. For this reason, the decline of the Roman Republic can be seen as a systematic failure and one that naturally could only be compensated for by the Empire that would follow.

As we have already discussed, the surge of money into the Republic did not serve to buoy the system but instead caused more instability. The many victories of the Republic as it fought against enemies far and wide brought too much too quickly into Rome. This money stagnated at the top and never distributed fairly into the system. What's more, the promise of all this war booty led to many abuses on the part of Roman military leaders, who would seek to profit by engaging in illegal behaviors and extorting monies from distant provinces. While Rome would establish protocols for dealing with this extortion, the damage was already done. Romans on the way up saw such behavior as necessary to succeed, making war profiteering a weapon wielded by ambitious Romans in the rise.

With this rise in power and wealth came a good deal of outsized egos. The patrician senators who already wielded too much influence were only getting more money and wealth and now had international reputations and fame to boot. Masters of the Horse and wealthy senators began indulging in a decadence and a status-based culture that had never been seen in Rome and would set the precedent for the outrageous decadence that would eventually bring down the Empire generations later. The Masters of Horse, additionally, became all too powerful, wielding their unique position as military authorities and as wealthy men to destabilize Roman society even further.

The Agrarian Slave Economy

The influx of free labor from slaves and the destruction of the Italian

countryside led to a complete realignment of the agrarian model on the Italian peninsula that would also help to bring down the Roman Republic. Slave labor allowed the wealthy to create enormous estates that outperformed and even destroyed smaller, regional farmers. On a socio-economic level, this shift also redefined Rome as a mass producer but stripped it of its skilled class.

This rising slave class was also an enormous threat to the oligarchs who wanted to keep a firm hand on Rome. According to some estimates, a quarter million slaves came into the Italian peninsula during this period as a result of conquests. That is an enormous population of potentially angry and abused people who may eventually have something to say about their quality of life. And say it they did. Multiple slave revolts throughout the Republic, including Spartacus' famous stand against Crassus and Pompey would add to the class warfare in Rome and the inherent instability of the Republic.

Rome as the Capital of the Republic

Other factors to consider were the changes happening to the city of Rome itself. As the capital of a growing Republic that was an empire in all but name, Rome became a very busy hub. The city ultimately was not ready to deal with the pressures of this role. Farmers, war slaves, and artisans in search of work all descended on the capital, putting a strain on its supplies and infrastructure and pushing the city to the brink. A massive effort was undertaken during the Republic to get the city's infrastructure up to par. From the beginning of the Republic to its end, Rome the city would go from a two-road city to a massive system of bridges and aqueducts.

The irony of this of course is that to accomplish this, Rome had to bring in more slaves and more common folk to do the labor. A city already facing sizable difficulties in terms of class warfare had a huge surge of the common man in the city. What was worse was that this urban development would eventually wane, leaving the city flush with the poor but with little work available. This caused the economy with the city walls to stagnate during critical periods of the Republic, further frustrating the populace and inciting class warfare. What's more, none of those commoners could feasibly return to the countryside, as it had been transformed by slave labor and enormous, factory-like estates.

Rebellion and Discord in the Provinces

The financial burden for much of this fell on the Romans living in far-flung provinces. These financial demands not only left many provinces impoverished, but also left many citizens of these provinces angry at Rome. Roman tax collectors didn't help, as they used a high hand to strip funds from provinces whenever Rome asked for it.

This led naturally to many rebellions in provinces such as Lusitania, Spain, Corsica, and Sardinia. The father of the Gracchus brothers suppressed one such revolt in Sardinia, imprisoning almost 100,000 citizens of the island. All of this agitation would only strain the Republic further, disturb the social balance, and drain Roman coffers—a perfect recipe for ultimate demise.

Military Challenges

If maintaining the city and provinces was difficult, maintaining the growing military was twice as difficult. As discussed, the military would grow more and more mercenary, with poorer Romans joining in search of financial incentives. Rome also had the burden of manning armies for multiple theatres of war, spanning from Hispania all the way to the Middle East. The only way to man these forces was through conscription, with Rome drafting prospects as young as 16 to wage the Republic's many wars outside the Italian peninsula. These conscripts were faced with minimum wage and found themselves deposited in unknown, foreign regions with no resemblance to the places they knew and loved. The military was not only becoming unwieldy, it was also becoming disgruntled. These disenfranchised men would become easy prey for the outsized egos of men such as Pompey and Caesar, who could use their cults of personality to demand loyalty from these men.

A Weak Aristocracy

Finally, the social decline of the Republic also came down to the vacillating and spoiled wealthy class. These aristocrats had enjoyed

comfort for too long and were unwilling to make the difficult decisions necessary to maintain balance in such a complex Republic. Mostly, the aristocracy took umbrage at the problems of the Republic, offended that anyone would deign to question their authority or drain their power. While some men of character existed in these ranks, by and large these were decadent men unwilling to compromise and unwilling to remain useful to the city they ruled. This would not only exacerbate class warfare but also would lead to smart men such as Caesar wresting control from these weak-minded aristos.

The Rise of Tiberius Gracchus

Despite the differing opinions around the cause of the Crisis, most historians typically cite the career of Tiberius Gracchus as the start of the downturn of the Roman Republic. Gracchus ascended to power in Rome during a time when everything seemed fine on the surface, but the rumbles of revolution were starting to rise well below that surface.

Gracchus served as the Tribune of the Plebs starting in 134 B.C. Gracchus' role would be as advocate for the lower classes, as such. With large swaths of land won during the wars in the power of the government and the Patrician families, Gracchus saw the first issue he could fight for.

Gracchus took the bold move in his first year in office to bypass the senate and pass some sizeable agrarian and land reforms into law. Thanks to the Hortensian law passed by the Plebs the century before, Gracchus had the right to do this and defy the Patrician senators. He wrested large estates from the hands of the state and the wealthy and sought to break them down into smaller components. His goal was to increase the number of Romans who could own land and the number of average Romans who could qualify under the census as soldiers.

This shift understandably sent a shiver up the spines of wealthy Romans. Luckily, they had a Tribune on their side as well—Marcus Octavius. He leveraged his veto power to stop Gracchus' reform in its tracks, thus sparking the first mini crisis of the larger Roman Crisis.

Gracchus responded in turn. He went to the assembly and demanded the removal of Octavius through impeachment. In response, the senate shut down all funds that would have channeled into the commission running the land reform plan. Gracchus then turned to a trust fund left to the state by an ally, but the Patricians managed to stop those funds as well. This back and forth escalated even further, with Gracchus going as far as to have Octavius physically dragged off the oratory platform in the senate.

The sham of Roman 'equality' was quickly exposed. The aristocrats started wielding their "natural" rights, citing the Lex sacra which forbid those of lower caste from touching an aristocrat. The Patricians were showing their true colors finally, exposing the truth about the

imbalances in Roman society.

Gracchus would not give up. Knowing that the Patricians had most of the constitutional power, he turned to the people instead, asking that the people re-elect him to another year despite the fact that term limits were in place for all tribunes. The aristocracy responded in the most savage way possible by finally assassinating Gracchus.

Riots and discord ensued. The people were incensed at the easy extermination of their advocate. It quickly became clear to the average Roman that any equality they had in the government was only for show, and that the aristocrats would turn against any of them if it came down to that.

The Religious Implications in the Assassination of Gracchus

Interestingly, the assassination of Gracchus was played by both sides as a religious issue. The Plebeian assembly had long been linked to Ceres, goddess of the harvest, and her temple on the Aventine hill. This temple served as a center for the Plebeian religious cult, which in turn served as a cultural or ethnic affiliation for the Plebs. This temple also housed the archive and treasury of the Plebs, bringing religion and law together in a uniquely Roman way.

It was due to this combination of religion and politics that both sides were able to manipulate the narrative of Gracchus' assassination. The Patricians claimed that Gracchus' actions had been an affront to Ceres and that his assassination was necessary to preserve the equilibrium proscribed by the goddess and her cult. Likewise, the Plebeians defending Gracchus claimed he had sacred status as an advocate of the temple and, therefore, was above assassination.

This back and forth went on. Finally, the senate got the upper hand by ritualizing Gracchus' assassination via a mission to Ceres' temple. These attempts to ameliorate the anger of the Plebs would not work in the long run, however; there were more reformers and more conflicts in the Crisis to come.

Gaius Gracchus

Almost a decade later, Gracchus' young brother, Gaius Gracchus, would take his brother's place as the great reformer of Rome. His reforms would be even more dramatic than the first Gracchi; the senate's response, in turn, would be even bloodier.

Gaius Gracchus first rose to prominence by serving on the land commission established by his brother. After honing his political skills for nine years, including during a quaestorship, Gaius Gracchus was finally elected to serve as tribune in 122 B.C. He was famed for his oratory, which had the power it is said to move many. As soon as he was tribune, Gracchus began using this power to move forward with wide-reaching reforms.

He first addressed the judiciary system, giving the people much more power over magistrates. For one, the people could prosecute any magistrate who had wielded his power to exile citizens without trial. Second, he prohibited censured magistrates from holding office a second time. These first forays were a signal from young Gracchus that he had certainly not forgotten the measures the senate had taken against his older brother.

Judicial reforms would continue, with Gracchus addressing the courts that handled capital punishment and extortion. Gracchus threw more power toward the people and neutralized the high hand of the aristocracy. He also drew up legislation demanding that criminal juries consist of equite members in addition to the usual Patrician senators.

Gracchus was no less ambitious with his land reforms. He sought to finish what his brother had started and expand from there. Gracchus pushed his brother's initial land reforms through and then established allotments under which free laborers could now be employed. Gracchus also facilitated reform to the grain supply chain so that Roman citizens could gain access to this key staple at a more reasonable price. He also expanded the road and infrastructure system to facilitate trade and communication across the ever-expanding Republic.

Being a clever politician, Gracchus did not forget the military, either.

He incurred serious reforms there to ensure that the average soldier was on his side, forbidding the deduction of clothing and weapon costs from a soldier's salary and ending the draft of young boys into the military.

The Patricians were not taking any of this sitting down. They were most successful in shutting down Gracchus' most ambitious reform, a franchise bill that would have extended citizenship to those on the fringes of the Roman Republic. Ironically, the Patricians succeeded in ending this reform because the Plebeians themselves didn't want to share the benefits of citizenship with just anyone.

Gaius was canny and smart in his political moves. Although he had an enormous amount of political power after his reforms, he did not seek political office after his first term, instead throwing his support behind one Gaius Fannius for consul. Gaius did set the precedent for one very significant snub against the patricians—he shifted his platform in the senate so that his famous oratory took place with his back to the senate from that point forward.

The Senate Back in Control

The Senate knew that they would have to do far more to wrest control back from Gaius. Rather than go straight to brutality, they took a political approach at first, establishing Livius Drusus as a tribune. He was to serve as a tribune "of the people" and offer a senatorial alternative to Gaius' advocacy. In reality, he would serve to work against Gaius at every turn.

The old back and forth between the Patricians and the Gracchi began once again. Every time Gracchus suggested a reform, the senate in the guise of Drusus would undermine him with a reform that was even more appealing to the masses. These small bites did their work, and the senate managed to chip away at Gaius until they ultimately sent him to North Africa to oversee the reconstruction of a Roman-Carthaginian colony. With him out of the way, they could move against his key ally Flavius and wrest back control of Rome. They also had a new ally in the form of Lucius Optimus, an oligarch determined to rid Rome of the populist notions of someone like Gaius Gracchus.

These conspirators found their chance in the death of Scipio the Younger. This man had been a key advocate against the first Gracchus and was a natural enemy of Gaius Gracchus. It was easy enough, as such, for the senate and its allies to foist blame for the death of Scipio on to Gracchus and his allies. This would lead to the escalation of the conflict and the ultimate death of Gracchus.

Gracchus Back in Rome

With the senate gaining momentum against him, Gaius returned from Carthage to Rome to face the consequences. The people were still very much on his side, but his political fortunes were shifting amongst the powers-that-be. Optimus, Drusus, and Marcus Minucius were all elected to tribune and started reversing the Gracchi reforms one by one.

Gaius' response was understandably dramatic. He first relocated his residence from the elite Palatine hill to a site near the Forum, placing him amongst the common people. Next, he began to seek allies for legislation that would block the reversal of his reforms. One key ally, however, had turned against him. Fannius was now in the pocket of the senate and declared that anyone who was not Roman by birth must leave the city. This action undercut a huge section of Gaius' support base. Gaius spoke out against this move against the Italians, but failed to follow through and ended up losing some face amongst the people.

Things would reach a head when an attendant of Optimus was murdered on the very day the senate planned to repeal Gaius' reforms. Roman historians pass down two very different accounts of what happened that day. Plutarch tells us that Optimus' attendant was supremely rude, pushing through a crowd of Gracchan supporters and insulting them with a rude gesture. Appian paints a very different picture, stating that the attendant Antyllus was subservient, even to the point of begging Gracchus to spare the Roman state, which Gracchus then dismissed rudely. Whatever the tone of the day, Gracchus' supporters attacked and murdered the man, launching the final events in the conflict between this reformer and the oligarchs.

The Assassination of Gaius Gracchus

The events that followed would highlight not only the ruthlessness of the senate and its allies but also the sharp differences in character between Gaius Gracchus and his ally Fulvius Flaccus. The morning after the murder of Antyllus, Optimus marched his body with much melodrama into the senate, orating on the fact that this murder in his eyes was just a precursor of what was to come from Gaius Gracchus. He even painted Gracchus as a tyrant, and declared that he was defending the freedom of the Roman people by advocating against Gaius Gracchus.

Fulvius' response to this was to act with much bluster, inciting his followers and arraying himself with the spoils of war before marching toward the Aventine. In contrast, Gaius walked alone with a single dagger slung at his side to face the consequences in the senate. After rejecting Fulvius' youngest son, who had served as emissary to the senate, the senate demanded that Fulvius and Gaius present themselves. Gaius agreed, but Fulvius refused. The senate quickly sent archers against Fulvius' position. Fulvius fled, only to be found in hiding shortly thereafter and murdered.

Gaius, on the other hand, went to the Temple of Diana to pray. He then intended to commit suicide but two friends stopped him, assuring him that they could ensure his escape and that he could live to fight another day. Gaius fled with his loyal servant, Philocrates, but was faced with betrayal and a refusal of help wherever he turned. Betrayed by the very people he had advocated for, Gaius finally committed suicide with his loyal servant by his side. Rome's brightest advocate, the man who had fought for the people, was left to die a lonely and ignominious death.

The Rise of Gaius Marius

While the great reformer that was Gaius Gracchus met a sad end, there would be more reformers to come. One such was Gaius Marius, a populist and general. His largest impact was on the military. He reformed many of the property requirements that had previously prevented men from becoming soldiers, thus opening up the ranks to the poorest of Romans. This was a practical move, as more troops were needed to fight off the Germanic tribes attacking Roman positions in Gaul, but it would have implications well beyond the practical to Roman society.

These reforms were invaluable in creating a more democratic and egalitarian army. They also enhanced the morale of the troops in some ways, as it was now an army of the people and for the people in some respects.

The Patricians, of course, looked unkindly on these changes. On one level, no aristocrat wanted to see armed poor people, while on another level it was believed that the plebs would make the army inefficient and lower its overall performance.

One unexpected impact of these military reforms was that they actually created a culture of greed in the ranks. Participation in the army became, for many, a way to ascend and gain access to wealth. The new culture was mercenary in some respects and led to intense competition between up and coming soldiers.

Marius remained popular, nonetheless, and was able to earn six terms as consul at the turn of the first century B.C. He gained momentum, too, when he led a successful military campaign against Germanic tribes seeking to invade Rome from the north.

As was par for the course in Rome at the time, however, Marius would eventually be brought down by the conspiring patrician class. The senate threw their weight behind Sulla, someone who had once served as Marius' quaestor, and sought to establish him as the supreme power in Rome. Like the foil to Gaius Gracchus in the previous generation, Sulla would act as a man of the people with the hopes of pulling down the reformer in the end.

The senate's first attempt came when they tried to give Sulla a key military appointment over Marius in the war against Mithridates of Greece. Marius eventually secured the placement, but Sulla defied him, gathering his troops and marching towards the East anyway. He received no censure or prosecution from the senate for this effrontery.

Marius, however, took advantage of Sulla's absence to incite a coup against him. He established a populist regime at long last, but unfortunately did not live long to see it through and was succeeded by his ally Cinna.

The Reign of Sulla

Even with Cinna ready to take over at the helm, this new populist approach to governing Rome would not last long. Sulla marched back toward Rome after making peace with Mithridates. Along the way, Sulla sought to negotiate his return to Rome. Cinna, in turn, marched his army out to meet Sulla, but was assassinated by his own men en route. When news reached Sulla that the army had turned against their populist leader, he moved to initiate his own coup. With popular oligarchs, including Crassus and Pompey at his side, Sulla swept aside all competition and established a dictatorship which could really be termed a reign of terror in many ways. Sulla used his power to denounce wealthy Romans left and right, seizing their properties and dispensing the lucre amongst his allies. He reversed all Gracchi and populist reforms, erased all record of populist initiatives, and transferred all political and judicial authority back to the oligarchs.

The Crisis of the Republic had reached a breaking point. Despite multiple attempts by the populists to bring some balance and equality to Rome, the wealthy Patricians would not give up control. The next leader, Pompey the Great, would exacerbate the situation even further.

Pompey Magnus

Pompey Magnus, or Pompey the Great (a self-styled name), was an ally of Sulla in his earliest years and yet another lackey of the oligarchs. He would, however, end up defying the controls of the Patricians and pursuing his own agenda based on military glory, ultimately leading to a perilous partnership with Caesar and Crassus in the First Triumvirate.

Pompey's early career was defined by working for the senate, suppressing a revolt by Lepidus who sought to take over after the death of Sulla. As he gained momentum as a military leader, Pompey would have less and less regard for the senate's authority and they would have more and more contempt for him. When he asked for imperium power in Hispania to deal with a populist general, the senate turned him down. Pompey responded by refusing to stand down his legions until the senate awarded his request. The senate finally gave in, setting a precedent and giving Pompey significant control to wage war as he wished.

One of Pompey's most famous successes came in his defeat of the legendary Spartacus. Spartacus was a slave and gladiator who would go on to lead a group of slaves in rebellion against Rome. Both Crassus and Pompey were sent to subdue this rebellion. Crassus got there first, as Pompey was far away in Hispania at the time. Pompey would get all the glory, however, arriving in time to rout Spartacus and his men after Crassus had trapped them. Pompey received the top honor of the Triumph from the state, while Crassus received a mere Ovation.

Pompey's other military actions would not prove as successful. He did manage to conquer Syria in the Middle East and defeat the King of Armenia, but all of these endeavors managed to introduce complicated new relationships for Rome, including a complex relationship with the Judean people, and brought a number of refugees and slaves into Rome. In the end though, nothing would prove more destructive to Pompey than his unholy alliance with Crassus and Caesar in the First Triumvirate.

The First Triumvirate

This union between Caesar, Marcus Crassus, and Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus at first distributed power evenly between the three men. When Crassus set off on a campaign in the East in an attempt to conquer the Parthian Empire in the Middle East, however, everything changed. Crassus' forces were defeated and Crassus himself was killed. The death of Crassus disturbed the careful balance, and Pompey and Caesar were soon at odds.

Pompey made the first move. While Caesar was busy waging his war against the Gauls, Pompey began legislating and working against Caesar within Rome. He began spreading rumors of Caesar's ambitions, portraying him (perhaps rightly) as a military beast ready to take complete control of Rome. Pompey's efforts proved fruitful—in 51 B.C. several senators came together to declare that Caesar should be prohibited from the consulship unless he was willing to cede control of his forces to the Roman state.

Caesar, naturally, was not one to take this lying down. Rather than be stripped of his army (and their defenses against his enemies), Caesar decided to launch civil war within Rome. He took the dramatic step of crossing the Rubicon river with his legion, an act that was prohibited under Roman law since he was no longer a magistrate. Caesar knew that he had crossed a line in more than the literal sense and had placed himself and his allies inexorably on the path to conflict. It is said he therefore made the famous declaration "*alea iacta est*" ("the die has been cast") as he crossed the river, woefully aware of the seriousness nature of what was to come.

In early 49 B.C., Caesar began his march back into the Italian Peninsula and toward Rome. Pompey had a larger army, but Caesar's forces were battle-hardened by years of war against the mighty Gauls. Pompey withdrew from Rome, and Caesar chased him to Greece, in addition to sending forces to take on Pompey's holdings in Hispania.

With his large army, Pompey had the advantage at first, but ultimately Caesar's tougher forces would prove more powerful. Pompey also had none of the aggressiveness of Caesar and dropped the ball after various victories, losing his chance to finally route Caesar. After continuous defeat, Pompey retreated all the way to Egypt where he

was finally murdered.

Pompey's allies in Rome would fight on without him, however, and the civil war continued for several years. The losses for Caesar during this period of the civil war were huge, leaving him with only two-thirds of his original manpower. He won several important battles, however, including the Battle of Thapsus and the Battle of Munda before taking complete control of Rome.

Caesar's ascension could in some ways be seen as the apex of the Roman Republic. A city state had extended its reach well beyond its borders and conquered enemies brutal and civilized alike. Caesar's rise, however, marked the starting point of the destruction of the Republic ultimately, and his career would come to represent as much that was troublesome in Rome as what was astonishing.



Caesar's Dictatorship

The brief reign of Caesar over the Roman Republic had a long-lasting effect on the city-state. While still part of the Republic, his rule would define "empire" in many ways. It would also start the series of events that would transform Rome from a Republic to the capital city of a global Empire.

Caesar wished to consolidate complete control of Rome once he crossed the Rubicon and ascended to power. Therefore, he declared himself dictator for a term of ten years. He also gave himself powers that leeched power from the traditional Roman institutions such as the senate, making him something very much like an emperor. In fact, many emperors to follow would model their approach on Caesar's rule. Not only did Julius Caesar hold the dictatorship over Rome, he also held the tribunate and the consulship and proconsulship at various times during his rule. With these powers, he could veto the senate whenever he liked and could even fill senate seats with his allies. To further control the senate, Caesar ultimately increased the number of seats in the senate to 900, draining the power and majority of the Patricians.

Ironically, Caesar's demise was predicated by the same conflict that had brought down Pompey—the war against the Parthian Empire. Determined to head East and finally win this war, Caesar declared himself in charge of appointing all magistrates, consuls, and tribunes during his absence from Rome. Magistrates, as such, become extensions of the dictator, essentially eliminating the people entirely from government. At this end point of the Republic, democracy was destroyed and a despot sat in power.

The Assassination of Caesar

Strangely, the senate that had so long worked against the people of Rome at long last ended up working in favor of the common man by arranging the assassination of Caesar. Led by Gaius Cassius and Caesar's own functionary, Brutus, this conspiracy of senators lured Caesar into the senate where they brutally stabbed him to death. It is one of the most famous events in history, appearing in Shakespeare and permanently marring the Ides of March.

The motivations for this conspiracy were not all noble. Some senators held a personal grudge against Caesar for his endless machinations against themselves and the state. Others feared a return to the Roman King of the city's early days. Naturally, some also feared that they would lose their wealth as Caesar planned on carrying out land reforms that would go in favor of the poorer classes.

It is perhaps due to the fact that there were mixed motivations in his assassination that the period after his death was a time of such chaos. The civil war that would follow would destroy any remnants of the Republic and set Rome inexorably on the path to Empire.

The Aftermath

Mark Antony, Caesar's nephew Octavian, and Marcus Lepidus established the Second Triumvirate in the aftermath of Caesar's murder. Strangely, they retained all the same despotic power that Caesar had wielded, albeit technically dispersed between three men. The Roman assemblies would remain entirely castrated and the Republic would plunge further into conflict.

The Second Triumvirate

The Second Triumvirate was actually a union between Caesarians and the man selected to wage war against them. How this came about is a unique tale. After the assassination, his lieutenant Mark Antony condemned the act and swore to persecute the conspirators who had murdered Caesar. The senate denounced Antony in response and gave Caesar's nephew and heir the military responsibility of facing Antony in battle. Octavian faced off with Mark Antony in the Battle of Mutina, where Antony was defeated but two powerful Roman consuls were killed.

Under the peace terms following the battle, Octavian, Antony, and Antony's fellow Caesarian, Marcus Lepidus, would form the Second Triumvirate. The unique aspect of this union was that it was a three-man dictatorship involving men who had been opposed to dictatorial power in the Republic in various ways. Antony had used his consulship, for example, to establish a *lex Antonia* that effectively banished dictatorship from the constitution of the Republic. Even odder, the three men stayed in their various territories: Lepidus ruled over Hispania and Narbonese Gaul, while Antony held Cisalpine Gaul and Gaul and Octavian held Africa, Sicily and Sardinia. The majority of power lay in the hands of Lepidus and Antony, leaving Octavian in a humiliating position and perhaps fomenting the grudge that would eventually develop into civil war.

One of the first steps the Triumvirate took was to refill Rome's coffers via proscription. They went straight after the conspirators who had destroyed Caesar, including Cicero and Marcus Favonius, but also went after Caesar's legate, perhaps in an attempt to eviscerate Cicero's entire family. Also financially destroyed were Lepidus' own brothers, who had jumped to condemn Antony and Lepidus in the aftermath of the assassination.

One of the next challenges faced by this odd coalition was going to battle with two of the conspirators against Caesar—Brutus and Cassius.

Octavian rode against Brutus, while Antony faced off against Cassius. The former lost, but the latter won, and Cassius and Brutus both committed suicide. While this might have brought some stability to

things with different men, these powerful personalities were too large to sustain a peaceful state of affairs.

After levying the proscriptions against these powerful men and adjusting the landscape of Roman power, Octavian began to reframe himself as the *Divi filius* of Rome, or "son of the divine", perhaps inspired by Caesar's own self-deification. He moved to redivide the Roman territories between himself and Antony, as well, leaving Lepidus out entirely. Allegations had begun to surface that Lepidus was in secret negotiations with Sextus Pompey, a traitor to Rome.

With Lepidus all but eliminated as a power player, Octavian moved to curry favor with his men by redistributing land to them. These actions displaced many a farmer so that these soldiers could benefit. This effrontery led to the Perusine War in which Antony's own brother moved against Octavian to right this wrong. The weakened Lepidus was left to defend Rome while Octavian gathered his armies to move against Lucius Antonius. During these troop movements, Antonius snuck into Rome and defeated Lepidus. Octavian returned to chase Lucius' forces down to Perugia where he eventually defeated him.

The resolution of this conflict led to another redefinition of the lands controlled by each member of the Triumvirate. Lepidus was at long last made governor of Africa and was given multiple legions once held by Antony. Octavian held fast control over Italy and eventually Gaul. Antony was left compromised, forcing him to marry Octavian's sister to preserve some power after his first wife Fluvia died.

The next problem to face the Triumvirate came when Sextus Pompey began waging a campaign of piracy to the south. These actions crippled Rome's already perilous finances, and Antony and Octavian were forced to sue for peace. During negotiations, Sextus demanded that he replace Lepidus on the Triumvirate, but Antony and Octavian refused, instead bestowing upon him official possession of the southern Italian islands.

Sextus refused to calm down, however, and continued to cause trouble in the South. Incensed, Octavian moved to take Sicily back from Sextus, but was defeated at sea. He then had to turn to Antony and make a deal, swapping the troops Antony needed for a campaign against the Parthians for ships.

Despite all these careful negotiations, the Triumvirate was still a tenuous relationship, made difficult mostly by the fact that Antony

loathed Octavian and that Lepidus felt like a second (or third) fiddle in all things. Lepidus' insecurities reached a crisis point after he and Octavian defeated Sextus in their campaign to retake Sicily. Lepidus sought to absorb Sicily into his territories, which Octavian interpreted as an attempt to usurp power. He openly accused Lepidus, after which Lepidus' own troops defected to Octavian, essentially ending Lepidus' role in the Triumvirate.

Two very prickly personalities were left in charge with Antony and Octavian. It would not be long before these two would fall into conflict as well.

Antony vs. Octavian

The conflict between Antony and Octavian that would develop would be the last great battle of the Republic and would lead to the establishment of Octavian as the first emperor of Rome.

The relationship between these two men was already made difficult by their dynamic personalities; it was further aggravated by the fact that Antony was openly disloyal to Octavian's sister. Antony famously had an open relationship with Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt, having several children with her. Octavian would use this relationship to shame and expose Antony. With popular sentiment turning against Antony as a result, Octavian set off to face both Antony and Cleopatra in battle. The Battle of Actium took place in Greece in 31 BC, where Antony and Cleopatra were routed and then chased back to Egypt. Defeated Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide, leaving Octavian the ultimate power in Rome.

While Octavian had seized all military power on Rome, he still needed an official decree in the political arena to seize complete and true power. He soon created the conditions -helped by Senate- to officially declare himself the one and only ruler of Rome. It was a careful balance—after all, he did not want to look like a dictator in the model of Caesar, nor did he want to look like a king as in the old Roman Kingdom. Instead, he decided to rule in a Principate; then, in 27BC he renounced to all provinces under his charge and renounced to all his powers so those were taken by the Senate and the Roman people, and finally the Senate declared him as Augustus, an honorific title that acknowledged Octavian's sacredness, and declared him *Princeps* of the Republic.

Conclusion

Thus ended the Roman Republic. It had been a time of rapid growth in Rome, expanding the city from a regional city state to an epic power that spread all the way to Africa. It also took Rome from a small hodgepodge of regional tribes to one of the most diverse collections of cultures on the planet.

How could the center hold on such a vast empire without the right people in charge and a bit of luck? The very spirit that had made the Republic what it was would ultimately be its demise. Ambition, greed, and a hunger for power polluted some of the Republic's best men, dragging down the city-state with them.

A new approach was needed—one that involved an iron fist. With Octavian now entitled and named Augustus, he would ascend to power as the first emperor of Rome. This ultimate power and authority would push Rome even further, transforming it into a power never seen in the history of man until then.

In the next book in this series, we will delve into the deep mysteries and obscene power of the Roman Empire. We will travel with Rome as it consolidates even more power around the world and eventually descends into a maelstrom of indulgence and corruption.

About the Author

Victor Miller is a 45 year old man living in historic Charleston South Carolina with his wife Jackie and two kids Kevin and Mark. Victor is a lover of history. Growing up he loved to learn about the ancient romans, Greeks as well as other historical events.

After completing high school he began to see the world. Taking a trip to Egypt to see the pyramids and then off to Rome and the surrounding areas he was able to see the worlds that he loved first hand. After getting married he began to settle down and began to write about his travels. He would be invited by high schools and other institutions of learning to tell his tales and show off artifacts that he has collected to students and staff.

With the development of Amazon and their publishing platforms Victor has been able to share his writings and love of history with the world. As of 2015 he plans on writing many more stories from his adventures and wealth of knowledge.



I hope this book was able to help you understand and admire the true story of the Rise and the Fall of the Roman Republic.

Finally, if you enjoyed it, then I'd like to ask you for a favor, would you be kind enough to leave a review for this book on Amazon? It'd be greatly appreciated!

Thank you again and good luck!